

"Swarm"

2011. Mixed media wall construction. 35" w x 23" h.

Collaboration between David Feinberg and Daliya Jokondo, daughter of The Sudanese Civil War survivor, with contributions from Chris Charbonneau, Sarah Hiatt, Silvia Mangia, Mike Zittlow, and Joni Christenson.

There are three separate stories told here, but all three stories overlap and are interconnected. These stories are the products of memories, stories passed on to us by our mother, and eavesdropping on my father's political gatherings. My father never directly spoke to us about the war.

Beginning in the far left is my mother's village and it's about to undergo a militant raid. These were frequent deadly attacks that left villages famished and filled with grief.

The midsection is about survival and what almost never was. It focuses on an incident that took place during one of those raids. My mother was between six and seven months pregnant at the time. During the chaos my mother was separated from her family and faced death at the hands of soldiers on a pick up truck. Her salvation came through her recognition of one of the soldiers. They were childhood playmates and perhaps out of shame at what he has become, he convinced the others to spare her life. The soldiers' faces, their voice, and the pick up truck are all images that plagued me for years. My mother was pregnant with me. Yet this became part of my reality.

The last panel on the right is of things falling apart. There is chaos, and this chaos comes in the form of bees and I have an intense fear of bees. So, I am very much tied to this last panel emotionally. I feel a heartbreaking loss in terms of deaths in my family, and my separation from them. I also feel great loss for my cultural and ethnic uprooting. Yet I can't allow myself to feel all these things.

Although the bees appear throughout the piece, they are tied to one story. My mother, aunt, my sister and myself were at a train station one night when something angered the bees in the farm nearby. They attacked in swarms. My mother covered all of us in thick blankets. She said the screams were terrible and there were deaths. It was an easily controllable situation that became uncontrollable through fear and panic. My mother always said that bees smell fear and sting only when they feel threatened. That's no different from humans and their reaction to the unfamiliar. Unfamiliarity can be read as danger, and people panic at the face of danger and make fatal mistakes. I felt fear throughout my life, but I could not let it take over me. You have to stop being afraid in order to survive.